



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

September 20, 2004

Mr. John Feldt  
Assistant District Attorney  
Denton County  
P.O. Box 2850  
Denton, Texas 76202

OR2004-8003

Dear Mr. Feldt:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under the Public Information Act (the "Act"), chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 209572.

Denton County (the "county") received a request for information held by both the county's human resources department and the county tax office pertaining to a discrimination claim made by the requestor and the county's subsequent investigation of the claim. You state that the county will release some of the requested information. You claim that the remaining requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.103, 552.107, 552.109, and 552.111 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Because the applicability of section 552.103 is potentially most broad, we consider this claimed exception first. Section 552.103 provides as follows:

- (a) Information is excepted from [required public disclosure] if it is information relating to litigation of a civil or criminal nature to which the state or a political subdivision is or may be a party or to which an officer or employee of the state or a political subdivision, as a consequence of the person's office or employment, is or may be a party.

....

(c) Information relating to litigation involving a governmental body or an officer or employee of a governmental body is excepted from disclosure under Subsection (a) only if the litigation is pending or reasonably anticipated on the date that the requestor applies to the officer for public information for access to or duplication of the information.

The county has the burden of providing relevant facts and documents to show that the section 552.103(a) exception is applicable in a particular situation. The test for meeting this burden is a showing that (1) litigation is pending or reasonably anticipated, and (2) the information at issue is related to that litigation. *Univ. of Tex. Law Sch. v. Tex. Legal Found.*, 958 S.W.2d 479, 481 (Tex. App.—Austin 1997, no pet.); *Heard v. Houston Post Co.*, 684 S.W.2d 210, 212 (Tex. App.—Houston [1st Dist.] 1984, writ ref'd n.r.e.); Open Records Decision No. 551 at 4 (1990). The county must meet both prongs of this test for information to be excepted under section 552.103(a).

To establish that litigation is reasonably anticipated, a governmental body must provide this office “concrete evidence showing that the claim that litigation may ensue is more than mere conjecture.” Open Records Decision No. 452 at 4 (1986). This office has concluded that litigation is reasonably anticipated where the prospective opposing party has filed a complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (“EEOC”). See Open Records Decision No. 336 (1982). In this instance, you advise and provide documentation showing that on May 11, 2004, the county received a notice of charge of discrimination from the EEOC. The charge of discrimination reflects that the requestor is the person filing the charge. You further inform us that the requestor’s EEOC charge was pending on the date of the county’s receipt of this request for information. You also state that the submitted information relates to the charges filed with the EEOC by the requestor. Based on these representations, we find that the county reasonably anticipated litigation on the date of its receipt of this request for information. We also find that the submitted information relates to the anticipated litigation. We therefore conclude that the county may withhold the information contained in Exhibits C and D at this time under section 552.103.

Generally, however, once information has been obtained by all parties to the litigation through discovery or otherwise, no section 552.103(a) interest exists with respect to that information. Open Records Decision Nos. 349 (1982), 320 (1982). Thus, information that has either been obtained from or provided to the opposing party in the anticipated litigation is not excepted from disclosure under section 552.103(a), and it must be disclosed. Further, the applicability of section 552.103(a) ends once the litigation has been concluded. Attorney General Opinion MW-575 (1982); Open Records Decision No. 350 (1982). Because section 552.103 is dispositive, we need not consider your other claimed exceptions.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body's intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Texas Building and Procurement Commission at (512) 475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. We note that a third party may challenge this ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't Code

§ 552.325. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Cary Grace", written in dark ink.

Cary Grace  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

ECG/jev

Ref: ID# 209572

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Maria de los Angeles Ayala  
1521 Greenlee  
Denton, Texas 76201  
(w/o enclosures)